

“Drug Trafficking in Utah”

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Life Society and Drugs

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Abstract

This essay is an overview on gangs, and what gangs are, as well as what they do. It also talks about the different gangs in the Utah and Salt Lake City counties. There have been a few drug busts that have resulted in a huge crack down on drug trafficking through the state of Utah. One of the biggest drug busts in Utah was by a combined force of state, local and federal agencies that resulted in catching the ring leader for the Belizean Blood gang. If our society can work together, we will be one step further in deterring the trafficking of drugs and weapons through our state borders.

Gangs and Drugs in Utah

As the Department of State has fought international drug production and trafficking, Secretary Baker has called drugs second only to war and peace as a priority of U.S. foreign policy (Rosini, 2011). According to the *Webster's New World Dictionary and Thesaurus* a gang, is a group of people working or acting together; specifically, a group of criminals or juvenile delinquents. Gangs are known for illegal drug sales, auto theft, vandalism and graffiti, firearm possession and trafficking. According to the most recent data, there are 26,500 gangs in the United States with approximately 785,000 members (Gaines & Miller, 2011). Also according to research conducted by the National Gang Intelligence Center, criminal gangs are responsible for 80 percent of the street crime in the United States (Gaines & Miller, 2011).

Utah or more so to say the Salt Lake metropolitan area is referred to as a “secondary gang city”. There are over 10 different gang affiliations in this area that stem from the Chicago and Los Angeles area. The Salt Lake City area may have the most diverse gangs in the western half of the United States (MGU, 2010). Major California affiliations in this area include but are not limited to Surenos, Nortenos, Crips and Bloods. The Crips wear dark blue and are affiliated with the following Salt Lake metropolitan gangs: Tongan Crip Gang, Lay Low Crips, Sons of Samoa, Tongan Crip Regulators, Tongan Style Gang, Original Laotian Gang, and the Salt Lake Posse (MGU, 2010). The Bloods wear red and are affiliated with the following Salt Lake metropolitan gangs: Kearns Town Bloods and the Tiny Oriental Posse. Major Chicago affiliations in this area include but are not limited to the Folks and the People. The Folks bear the number 6 and are affiliated with the following Salt Lake metropolitan gangs: Gangster Disciplines, Ambrose,

Black Mafia Gangsters, and the King Mafia Disciplines. The People bear a number 5 and are affiliated with the following groups in the Salt Lake metropolitan gangs: the Latin Kings, and the Vice Lords. The Barons and the Sundowners are two motorcycle gangs that have been involved in production, transportation and distribution of illegal drugs in the Salt Lake metropolitan area (MGU, 2010). There are also a number of Southeast Asian gangs, Polynesian gangs, racist and non-racist Skinheads, and Straight Edger's.

So what makes the gangs in Salt Lake City very different from the gangs in other parts of the United States? Well it is because most gangs in other parts of our country are usually associated with certain cities, boundaries, or territories. According to Detective Lorenzo Leulau with the Valley Police Alliance "Through the whole Valley, gang members are able to go from one area to another, there are no limits, no boundaries for these gang members." (Iyamba, 2011). Due to this problem, a task force was created last fall by the Utah law enforcement agency called The Valley Police Alliance Safe Streets Task Force. This task force is designed to share resources between local, state, and federal agencies to help curb gang involvement in the community. Already this year, the Valley Police Alliance Safe Streets Task Force has reported making 158 arrests, responding to nearly 225 gang-related calls and working on 350 cases.

Utah has become a popular state for drug trafficking, which has led to multiple vehicle stops and the confiscation of drugs such as methamphetamines, marijuana, and cocaine. One reason why Utah is such a hotspot for drug smuggling and drug distribution is because of its geographic location (Dubreuil, 2011). Utah has some of the largest highways that also run

through numerous other states, making it an ideal route for transporting illegal drugs (Dubreuil, 2011). Since California has a broader legalization of marijuana people from all over the United States cross the Utah interstates to more easily purchase marijuana there (Dubreuil, 2011).

Utah's police force, is working hard to try to control this problem. Utah's Highway Patrolmen are trained to spot suspicious activity and look for factors they consider to be suspicious, some red flags may be: the driver is not the registered owner of the vehicle in which they are driving, if a driver doesn't have a job, or if there are inconsistencies in his or her story (Dubreuil, 2011). Highway Patrolmen have found drugs located in various parts of a vehicle such as in gas tanks, doors, spare tires, and even hollowed out shoe soles (Dubreuil, 2011).

Due to the increase of gang related activity in the state and on the highways of Utah, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), which is the principal investigative arm in the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the second largest investigative agency in the Federal Government (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement), linked up with Utah law enforcement in an investigation to help crack down on gang and drug related activity. This was a three month federal enforcement effort called "Project Southern Tempest", concentrating on trans-national gangs affiliated with drug trafficking which resulted in 678 arrests nationwide, including more than 100 in Utah (KSL.com, 2011). Of the 104 arrested in Utah, 42 were in Salt Lake County including 14 in Salt Lake City, 27 were in Utah County, 15 were in Weber and Davis counties and the other 14 were in St. George (KSL.com, 2011). These individuals were tied to kidnapping, sexual assaults, drug charges, and weapons violations (KSL.com, 2011). Out of the arrests 86 are being prosecuted on Federal and State charges and 76 were foreign nationals from Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize.

When this investigation was conducted and the arrests were made, the Salt Lake City law enforcement officers linked the drug trafficking to the Belizean Bloods street gang. According to Matt Larsen, the supervisor of the FBI Safe Streets Task Force, “You will not find the Belizean Bloods gang in any clubs where drugs are affiliated, this street gang is different from most gangs, they are not easy to detect, they take a more “subtle” and “sophisticated” approach to criminal activity (Romboy, 2011). On November 4th however, 150 federal, state, and local police officers, including SWAT teams from the FBI, Salt Lake City, and West Valley City raided Salt Lake Valley homes starting at 2.a.m. making 10 arrests without any incidents and an eleventh person was apprehended on Friday (Romboy, 2011). The indictment followed an investigation that started in Chicago, where 24 members of the Belizean Blood gang were also charged that week (Rogers, 2011). Of the eleven gang members that were arrested, the authorities managed to indict Jerry Johnson, who was the ringleader of the Belizean Blood gang, who inherited his father’s drug connections when he was deported to Belize (Romboy, 2011). Jerry Johnson allegedly directed the distribution of powder and crack cocaine and “cooked” powder cocaine to produce crack, which were sold in wholesale quantities to Utah, Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, New York, and California (Romboy, 2011). The courts documents detail a series of phone calls from Johnson to drug dealers where transfers of narcotics and firearms were set up by using code words, in one instance they have Johnson referring to himself as a “chemist” and brags about being a master in cooking powder cocaine into crack (Rogers, 2011). The members of the Valley Police Alliance Safe Streets Task Force would not discuss any evidence that was taken into custody from the raid, but during the investigation in Chicago however, they reported that they seized bulks amount of powder and crack cocaine, firearms, assault rifles and cash

(Romboy, 2011). FBI agents were investigating the case of the Belizean Blood gang in Evanston and Chicago when they realized that the drug-trafficking operation included distributors in Utah, who were selling drugs in the Beehive state, as well as providing a pit stop on a trafficking route from California to Chicago (Rogers, 2011).

This was a huge breakthrough for the City of Salt Lake, all of the police forces combined together to catch what some may call “The big fish”, but not only did it help to crack down on the amount of drugs and firearms that are running through the Salt Lake City counties, it cracked down on the number of drugs and firearms running through our country. To think that the Belizean Blood gang was out there under the radar, and operating all the way from New York to California, well it makes you wonder just how much drug trafficking and firearms trafficking is really going on in our society, and just how many gangs are out there “fueling” the fire to our “War on Drugs”. Even though the charges brought upon the Belizean Blood gang will not end our “War on Drugs”, it takes us one step further in deterring the trafficking of drugs and firearms especially if the government will instill a firm punishment to those who were convicted. Like the U.S. attorney for Utah, David Barlow said, “This is a huge step in hampering the violent gang’s drug ring, and the joint efforts demonstrate the commitment we share in combating gang violence and drug trafficking in Utah communities” (Rogers, 2011). Some people feel like “Oh my goodness, this doesn’t happen in our society”, but this goes to show you that crime is going on everywhere in our country and we have to take steps and work together to prevent it.

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